

# COUNTRY TOWN STORY

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# ILLUSTRATIONS

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# COUNTRY TOWN STORY

## BY WAY OF EXPLANATION

THE ENGLISH COUNTRY TOWN in the 18th century, with stage coaches stopping at its lighted inns, with picturesque small-paned shops and old houses, and much snow on the ground, has always been a favourite subject for Christmas numbers and Victorian painters. But its story is much longer, and its gradual process through the ages is one of great fascination.

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What in the post war years will be the future of the country town, that small town which represents so many things essentially British? It is something that stands for the past but belongs to the present.

The country town has developed gradually, it should always be developing. It usually contains much, especially among its buildings, that tells the story of the lives of its inhabitants and their customs through the centuries, and much of it should be worth preserving.

The English country town is a thing by itself, it can never arise again in exactly the same way. The narrowness of the streets that gives such a picturesque effect has become some danger to its inhabitants with the increase of motor traffic. It may be, however, that in planning our new roads the authorities will give back to the country town a modicum of its past glories.

There are many considerations to be faced. Should an historic town be preserved in such a way that it becomes merely a "museum piece" telling the story of its past, a dead thing, no longer developing and playing an active part in the life of the country?

It cannot be denied that many country towns possess some buildings that they could easily do without, from an architectural point of view, they would be no loss. Some old towns have special problems affected by their situation that must tell upon the all-important one of the traffic.

Changes have to come, but with alterations, there is one thing that is essential, good taste has to be used, as well as knowledge and some consideration for the past.

There must, of course, be new and modern building in a live place, but these can show beauty, they can be well placed and built; be well designed, so that they fit in with the existing background.

### THE APPROACH TO THE TOWN

WHEN its buildings first come into view, there is often a thrill that never stales at the approach to an unknown town. It seems to make but little difference whether the arrival is by train, when there is an eager glance through the carriage window, or by car or other vehicle along the highway, or over the hills on foot, the feeling of anticipation is the same.

It was by road or track that the country town in olden days was first reached. Then the first view would still have been like the definition of a town—a collection of houses enclosed by a wall or hedge. It was important that a town should be reached before nightfall and the shutting of its gates. There was safety inside from the robbers and outlaws that at some periods infested the country side, solitary travellers might well be suspect.

So, many people travelled together in bands, and if bent on the pilgrimage once so popular, not only for doing penance, but as a safe way of seeing the world, large numbers might arrive outside a town at dusk. Before there were any inns they had to be housed for the night in the Guest House of a monastery near by, or at one belonging to the great Abbey round which the town had sprung up.

It is still possible to arrive at some country towns and to see them from one direction as they must have appeared in olden times, but at others, shoddy modern buildings have spread over what were once pleasant meadows and on to the downs beyond, an unpleasant intrusion. There





THE APPROACH  
TO THE TOWN

seems to have been no attempt at a "green belt," wise planning, or any check to the speculative builder.

The first sight of the tip of a church tower will show that a town is not far ahead. Then perhaps the ruins of a castle keep, high on its mound may appear, followed by a cluster of red roofs. The special character of some places will be apparent at once.

In the 18th century when William Cobbett rode about the country, observing the conditions of the agricultural labourer, he journeyed on from one country town to another where he would pass the night. He must have often reined in his horse as he reached a height, and have stopped to gaze at the view, showing the country and a small town spread out below. When a place specially appealed to him and was up to the standard of what he thought a country town should be, he always described it as "neat and clean," the word "pretty" he kept for villages. He might very well have used a favourite word of his: a "Wen," to describe the heedless extension of a town in modern times. He could say nothing good of places that existed specially for pleasure, such as the popular Spa, Cheltenham, he utterly despised.

Writing of Dorchester, always called Casterbridge in his novels, Thomas Hardy in "The Mayor of Casterbridge," makes one of the characters say when viewing the town for the first time: "It is huddled all together, it is shut in by a square wall of trees like a plot of ground by box edging." Trees can give a comfortable appearance to a town, in bleaker districts the whole place is exposed to view.

The characteristics of the neighbourhood can often be grasped at once by the materials used in the buildings of the town, the preponderance of stone or brick, whether slates or tiles have been used for the roofs, whether the church towers are high or squat.

A country town is a centre for the neighbouring villages, and most certainly the hub of the universe for them in the past—a centre for the agriculture of the district or it existed for its iron foundry, its saw mills, its weaving



THE MAIN STREET

R. A. Cook

industry. In hop-growing districts for its breweries, what ever provided wealth and livelihood for its inhabitants. There are places where through natural circumstances the industry has shifted elsewhere. It follows then, that the town declines, only leaving buildings to tell of its past glories.

In the first place towns arose round the castle of the lord of the district or outside a thriving abbey. The Saxons must have had some towns of importance perhaps built round a vital defensive fortification, some coins have been dug up at a town in Sussex, and they show that at the time of the Saxons it had been large enough to possess two mints.

The Saxons built their houses largely of wood, with stone foundations. It is known that they used wood for their fortifications. In the distance, their towns appeared as a cluster of huts surrounded by a strong stockade. It was the Normans who first built stone castles in England.

It is easy to wonder why in the first place a certain situation was chosen for a town, it was not anything haphazard. It may have been decided by several things—a ridge forming a natural defence on one side, and with a fine view over the neighbouring country, a bed of gravel surrounded by a river or marshes, another form of natural protection, or perhaps there was an important ford that needed to be guarded. To-day, many towns have extended far beyond these barriers.

After the Norman soldiers arrived in England and the organization of the country that followed, the building of strong castles began. Then arrived the workmen, and servants, as well as the craftsmen and artists necessary for the building of the castles and abbeys that were springing up all over the country. The dwellings for all these people would gather round these centre buildings, and thus a township would be created. With these would mingle the huts of the native serfs whose labour would also be a necessity.

By the reign of Henry II the towns had gained importance and the real communal life begun to evolve. The citizens



Ruth Cobb  
THE STRAND GATE  
WINCHELSEA  
1948

were having a time of struggle for their freedom and rights against their overlords. The Abbots often assumed great control and were very exacting to the citizens. Consequently, open strife frequently occurred with rioting and pillaging which adversely affected the development of the towns.

It was about this time that what in present day is called local government began to function. If the township was sufficiently important, the King would appoint an official as his personal representative, who would then appoint leading burgesses to act as his assistants.

### TOWN GATES AND WALLS

MANY people who go about their ordinary occupations in a place where perhaps they have lived all their lives, or for many years, are so familiar with the names of the streets that they pay little attention to them. They do not consider their origin, and to the unobservant there is often little left to give the clue. Westgate Street, Eastgate Street, Watergate Lane, or Eastout—what did they stand for in the past?

It seems to be quite forgotten that the familiar town where they pass their lives was once protected by strong gates and walls, and that the town was originally entirely enclosed by these. The places where the gates once stood, and of which only their names survive, are now well within the town that has in the course of centuries extended far beyond the original boundaries.

Some towns, perhaps through natural cliff foundations on one side, had only two gates, a North and a South, with the chief road running between the two and out on to the country beyond, hence the names North Street and South Street that are so familiar. One gate may have stood at the river level, at the base of the hill on which the town is perched, where boats came to unload, or perhaps before silting the sea once extended. It is often difficult to realize that what is now an inland town eight



THE TOWN GATE  
Ruth Cobb

or nine miles from the sea, once stood on a sea shore, that it may have been a port, and that probably furnished a certain number of ships for the British Navy to help in the guarding of the coastline. There may be no sign now of any connection with sea or ships except the name Watergate, or the weather-vane in the form of a fish on the tower of an aged church, and by marine deposits that are turned up from the soil in the laying out of the new estates outside the town.

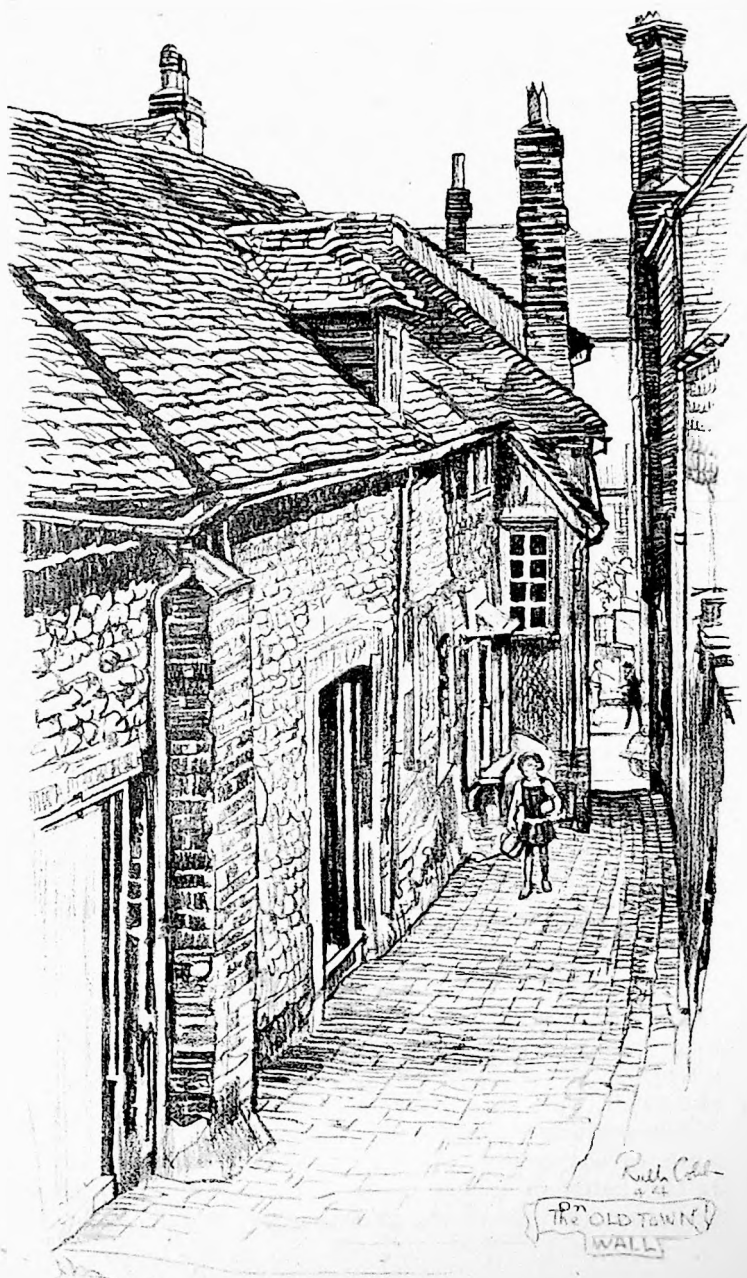
But many towns had four gates, with roads that ran from each and intersected in the centre, forming an open place. This became the pivot of the town with a Market Hall or Cross, a conduit for the water of the town, or a statue of the legendary founder. The word Carfax, meaning four ways, is still in use in some towns.

In the early history of the country towns, the gates and walls were of the greatest importance for the safety of the citizens. The gates would be closed at the curfew hour, and if the walls were surrounded by a moat, the drawbridge pulled up. When more peaceful times arrived and the countryside became more or less settled, then buildings began to spring up outside the walls and such districts were spoken of as Westout and Eastout.

It was the increase of traffic on the roads that brought about the final disuse of many town gates, they were gradually allowed to decay or be pulled down, and in many cases only the name survives. Cathedral cities seem to have preserved their gates better than the towns, greater care seems to be taken of historical and beautiful buildings, but some fine old gates are still to be seen in country towns, that are kept in repair because of their great interest, there are good specimens at Winchelsea and Sandwich.

Tavistock, an ancient borough in the heart of Devonshire, came into existence largely as a centre of the tin-mining industry of the neighbourhood, gathered round a Saxon monastery that flourished until the Dissolution. The Town Gate that still stands is the one nearest to the entrance to the Abbey. It is a fine building, the rooms above it are in use as a Corporation library.





Many pieces of the old town walls, part of the early fortifications, remain in some country towns although their original purpose is long forgotten. In the very beginning these defences would have consisted merely of mounds or earth walls, with deep ditches on the outside, sometimes if the place was of great importance, there would even be two ditches. A narrow turning with the name Castle Ditch is a survival from those days, although the words may convey little meaning now.

On the top of these mounds there would have been a row of stakes, a stiff obstacle to be overcome. When the Normans came they used stone for their walls, but following the lines of the earlier defences, a piece of rock, or cliff, difficult to scale, might be worked in as a part of the walls, and there the stronghold or castle would often be built.

The Saxon strongholds have disappeared, but a plateau where one may have stood and have had a wonderful look-out over the surrounding country, can still be traced below a castle of later date standing on an artificial mound above. This may give the name to a church now standing on the ledge, built perhaps by the Normans or Saxon foundations, with "Sub Castro" coming after the name of the saint to which it is dedicated.

When a town was besieged in the Middle Ages, all sorts of devices were used in the storming of the gates, and the scaling of the walls. Wooden erections on the principle of a catapult were brought up to throw stones and pieces of heavy iron on to the defenders inside, and there would also be attempts at tunnelling underneath the walls and moat.

There was a walk along the top of the Town Walls from which a look-out for an approaching enemy was kept day and night. There were towers at intervals to strengthen the walls, and slits through which boiling oil and pitch could be poured on to the attackers below.

Some towns suffered much through the quarrels of the lords of the castles, as well as of their own inhabitants. In the battle of Lewes in the 13th century, the fighting began on the top of the downs about a mile and a half



The Damaged Wall

from the town. The fighting continued down the hillside into the town itself, causing much damage to the walls. Two years later, application was made to the king by the citizens, asking that they should be allowed to raise a tax on the iron brought into the town, so that they could raise money in this way to repair the walls.

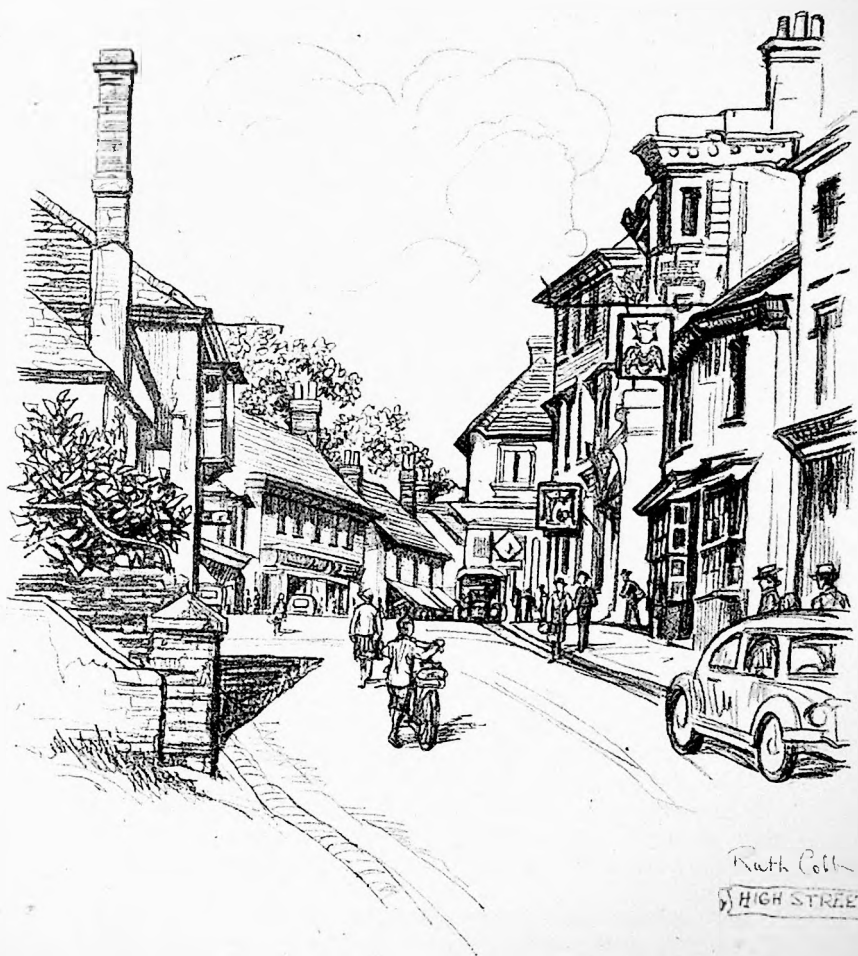
Sometimes pieces of the old walls have been preserved and carefully tended as part of recreation and public gardens. These are often delightful places when well-kept with fine views over the distant country. Some corporations now propose to make drastic changes which will do away with many narrow and romantic turnings once part of the old town walls, "opening up" as they say, quite regardless that it will utterly destroy much that tells the story of the past history of the town.

At Dorchester, although the town on some sides now extends far beyond it, there is still a tree-lined walk round the town, edging the ancient walls that go back to the time when it was a Roman town.

Thomas Hardy describes the stockade of gnarled trees as it framed the town in his day: "Itself an avenue standing on a low bank or escarpment with a ditch just visible without. Within the avenue was a bank or wall more or less discontinuous, and within the wall were packed the abodes of the burghers—these external features were but the ancient defences of the town, planted as a promenade."

It is still possible in some big towns where the walls are still in good condition, to walk completely round them. Though the view on one side may be mainly one of a river and distant hills, it has to be confessed that on the other there may be a very squalid sight, a view into the back-yards of some of the slums of the town.

As in London, so in the country towns in Southern England pieces of old town wall have been rediscovered and exposed through enemy bombing, perhaps opening up a corner in a strange and unexpected and often striking manner. What is to be done with such places in the future is a minor problem. Should they be built up again in the



old way, or left as they are to tell part of the recent history of the town?

In the future planning of a country town, no stone walls will be built to protect it, as were needed in the past, but a green belt will surely add to its adornment.

## THE MAIN STREET

THE beginning of the main street of a country town may seem somewhat quiet, but it will often have signs of a charm of its own that augers well for the rest of the place. A few sedate houses will be seen with trees between, suggesting delightful gardens behind old walls, and a few attractive shops.

There may be a descent into the main part of the town, or a steep hill leading up to it, according to the situation on which it has been built. This prevents an appearance of monotony which is sometimes seen when a place is entirely built on the flat.

Charles Dickens says when writing of one of Mr. Pickwick's journeys, by coach, that: "a few small houses scattered on either side of the road betokened the entrance to some town—now the bugle plays a lively air as the coach rattles through the ill-paved streets of a country town."

Then the coachman informs Mr. Pickwick of the name of that town and tells him it was market day yesterday, both of which pieces of information Mr. Pickwick re-tells to his fellow passengers. After changing horses, they set off once more: "Once again the houses disappear and they are once again dashing along the open road." Such was the arrival at a country town in the early nineteenth century.

Before there was any attempt at paving the roads through a town, in a wet season, just as in the cities, there must have been a sea of mud, before there was any attempt at making any kind of side walk to raise the pedestrian above the mire.



THE CROSS ROADS

Rich. Cobb  
44

The paving stones of a town, little noticed at some hours of the day when the streets are full of people, may tell a good deal of the characteristics of a town. Very often red brick with a tinge of blue will give a charming effect of colour and pattern to the walks. There is much tendency to-day, when these bricks have become sunk and worn by the passing of the feet of men and women through countless years, to replace them with concrete slabs.

The width of streets is often effected by the purpose for which the town has grown up. The grey stone towns of the Cotswolds, which were given up to the wool industry, have very wide streets so as to allow great flocks of sheep to pass along them. These often have a very charming appearance with verges and pavements raised higher than the rest of the roadway, and edged perhaps with a row of pollarded trees.

The narrow street with its high-pitched gables and roofs is often a delight to the eye, but it is the kind of street that is an urgent part of the problem of the future of the country town. Something has to be done to deal with the traffic in such a narrow space.

Sooner or later, all the inhabitants of a country town seem to converge on to the High Street or "chief street." In some there are no "parking" places in the centre of the town for cars, or if so they are too small. In the High Street of some towns, the rule is made that cars must park on one side of the road on the even dates of the week, on the other on the odd.

Although civilian cars largely disappeared off the country roads during the war years, traffic did not seem to be much less in the towns. Officials working in the county offices still came in from their houses outside, and there was the added army traffic—jeeps, tanks of every description and other queer mechanized vehicles. Even damaged aeroplanes and landing craft on huge lorries came through the High Street, creating many a block and jam. This would be of great interest to all those who still had time "to stand and stare," but added to the dangers of the streets.



It is in the morning that a High Street in a country town can be seen at its busiest, with people passing along the narrow pavements to do their shopping, an important part of the day. People stop to gossip with friends and perhaps adjourn to one of the cafés usually to be found in abundance.

The contrast between the traffic in a country town of the early 19th century and that of to-day is illustrated in the novel of Jane Austen "Emma." Highbury is a small country town, and Emma becoming very bored one day when her friend Harriet is taking a long time over her purchases at the chief linen drapers, went to the door of the shop to look for some amusement—"Much could not be hoped from the traffic of even the busiest parts of Highbury. Perhaps the Doctor walking hastily by, the Solicitor letting himself in at his office door. Carriage horses returning from exercise, or a stray letter boy or an obstinate mule were the only objects she could presume to expect, and when her eyes fell only on the butcher with his tray, an old woman travelling homewards from the shop with her full basket, two curs quarrelling over a dirty bone and a string of dawdling children round the baker's little bow window, eyeing the ginger-bread, she knew she had no reason to complain and was amused enough, quite enough, to stand still at the door."

No doubt people bent on the same kind of things would still be seen in the streets as in Emma's day, but now the Doctor would pass in his car, every one moves about more quickly, things have become speeded up. But even in the past, on some days, the streets would have been busier than on others, there would be more traffic in the High Street on market day, the most important day of the week. Besides the market carts there would be gigs bringing in the farmers and their wives. Drovers of cattle would be driven through the main streets, and frightened at their strange surroundings would often stray on to the side walks amidst shouts from the throng. To-day, cattle arrive in huge motor vehicles.

One of the thrills of the old town was when the mail coach was expected to pass through and much speculation when it was delayed by the weather and the state of the roads outside. There were also the carriers' carts that conveyed humbler passengers, and packages to the neighbouring villages. John Peribingles cart in "The Cricket on the Hearth," was typical. Sometimes the carrier would be a woman. Hardy gives a good description of such a one: "Mrs. Dollery, having to hop up and down many times in the service of her passengers wore, especially in windy weather, short leggings under her gown for modesty's sake, and instead of a bonnet, a felt hat tied down with a handkerchief to guard against an ear-ache to which she was subject. In the rear of the van was a glass window, which she cleaned with her pocket handkerchief every market day before starting. Looking at the van from the back, the spectator could thus see through its interior, a square piece of the same sky and landscape that he saw without." But later on, besides the carriers' carts to the town there were a few small horse buses at very long intervals.

It was the coming of the motor bus that caused a revolution in transport, and has had such an enormous influence on the country town. Previously people from the neighbouring villages only came into the town once a week for market day, or for any special shopping. Now it is usual for many of them to come in by the motor bus several times a week to visit the cinema or other attraction.

Where all these buses and cars and coaches are to be allowed to "park," and also stop, has become an urgent matter. This problem has already been dealt with in some places by the wholesale pulling down of houses that should have been left, and so forming bare, untidy spaces close to the centre of the town. Unfortunately there remain many schemes for this indiscriminate and disastrous kind of town planning.

The streets of many a country town have been seen in a new aspect during the years of war when no street lighting was allowed. On moonlight nights they must have looked



THE MARKET CROSS

Ruth. Cobb

much as they did in olden days, only then there would have been cheerful, welcoming gleams of light behind the curtains in the casements, and people passing by and exchanging greetings by the glow of their lanterns, or on the way to visit their friends in sedan chairs. In very early days, the streets would have been unsafe after dark for pedestrians, for robbers lurked in corners and alleyways.

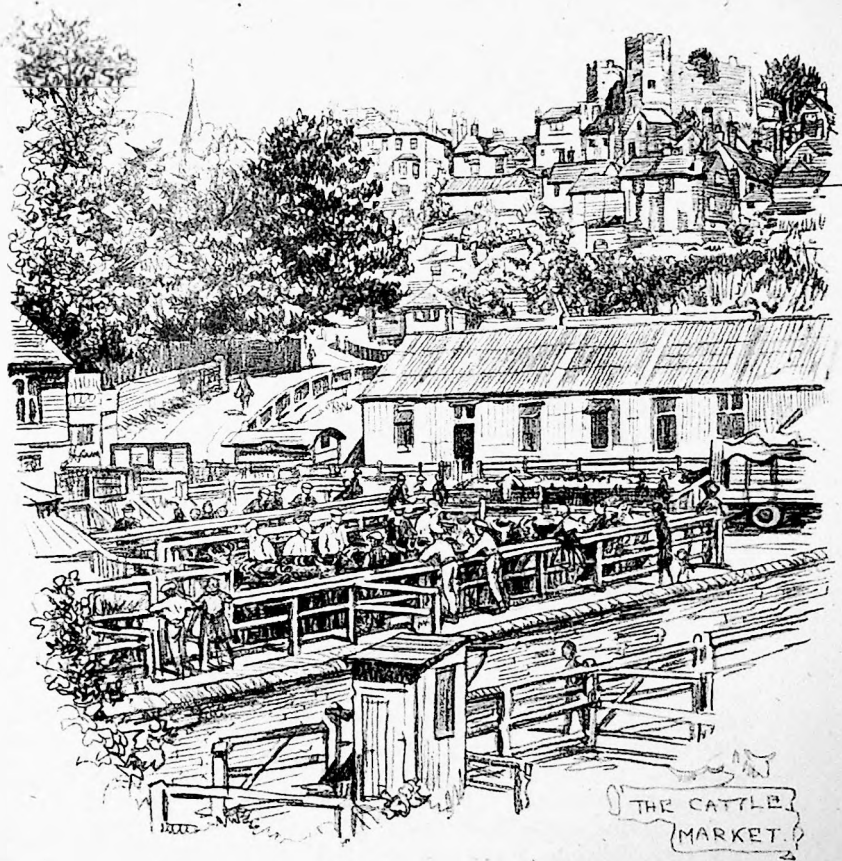
## SHOPS AND MARKETS

FROM time immemorial, shopping seems to have had a special fascination for many people, beginning from the days when as children they were given a penny to spend. Women in particular delight in bazaars, sales of work, and even jumble sales, apart from the special joy of looking in shop windows, just as much now as when in the beginning shops were merely stalls displaying goods. There is no doubt a psychological explanation for these persistent traits.

But there is, of course, a distinction between shopping for pleasure, the buying of things not really wanted, and the buying of necessities for existence. Shopping began with barter, an exchange of goods, no money passed. It was an exchange of products, the things necessary for the wants of primitive people, who met at a specified place for the exchange. Such was the beginning of the market from which the shop developed.

As the market grew, certain rules had to be laid down for their guidance. In the days of the Saxons in England, one of their district rules ordered that nothing worth more than twenty pence be sold within twenty miles of a market centre, everything else was to be brought to the market.

By the time of the Norman rulers the markets were often quite large and important in the life of a town. The steward of the lord of the castle round which the town had sprung up, would give the necessary license, or if the town existed round an Abbey, permission would come from there. It would exercise great control and



THE CATTLE  
MARKET.

the ordinary customer would have to wait until the purchasers from the monastery had had the first pick of the goods to be sold. This often caused much resentment and discontent.

The market-place was in the centre of the town where the roads from the gates of the town met. People who had houses round it would have stalls outside. Gradually, after the use of glass for windows became customary, the goods for sale began to be displayed inside the house so that they could have the necessary protection from the weather. The same process, as in Cheapside in London, went on in the country so, in course of years, the shop became established.

By the 13th century, markets in England had become flourishing, their charters were issued by the king. Besides the stalls outside the houses, the square would be filled by the stalls for the goods brought in by people from the surrounding countryside. The fame of some of these markets spread far and wide. Merchants came to visit them from places overseas, they arrived from Italy, Germany, France and the Low Countries, bringing with them furs, wines, and spices, among other things not to be had in England. Many of the merchants from Bruges came to buy the English wool that was so much prized.

In the middle of the market-place there often stood a special building used as a corn market, or a market cross. These crosses in the country towns were generally smaller than those in the Cathedral cities, such as Salisbury and Chichester, but they were quite as beautiful in their own way. They were usually built by private donors for the benefit of the poorer folk so that they should have a shelter for themselves and their goods, and yet not pay toll. They could sit on the stone seats round the central shaft with their baskets of country produce, the bright colours of the fruit and vegetables and flowers must have made a most charming contrast against the cool stone.

A very fine specimen of such a cross can still be seen at Shepton Mallet in Somersetshire, it is only a small town with a tiny square in the centre, but it still has a weekly

market, and when the stalls are set up it must look very much as it did in the middle ages. The cross was built in the year 1500, but the upper part had to be rebuilt in the 18th century. The original brass inscription on the cross can still be read, it tells of the donors: "Of your charity pray for the souls of Walter Buckbond and Agnes, his wife, with whose goods this cross was made in the year of our Lord God, 1500, whose obit shall be kept for ever in the Parish of Shepton Mallet, the 28th November."

William Cobbett speaks of Malmsbury possessing a cross, a thousand years old monument of ancient skill and taste, and proof of ancient wealth. He speaks constantly of the effect of wealth on such towns. But the cross that he saw was not the one built so long ago which an early historian describes as: "curiously vaulted for poore folkes to stand dry when rayne commeth," but one built in the 16th century which is of delightful if rather elaborate design. There are some crosses still to be seen about the country that are quite simple in shape.

It was from the steps of the crosses that the town crier used to stand to give out his notices. With the sound of his familiar voice and bell, people would gather round to hear what he had to say. A bell used to be rung from the market hall to declare that the market was open. There, at the same day and hour each week, could be seen farmers, merchants, dairymen, quacks, hawkers and those who came for the fascination of looking on. By the late afternoon all would be over and the square deserted, only wisps of straw and pieces of green-stuff lay about to tell of the busy morning.

The Market hall was often a big structure, open underneath, with arches and pillars, and a big room above. Hardy describes the one at Dorchester: "The low extensive hall, supported by beams and pillars and latterly dignified by the name of Corn Exchange, was thronged by hot men who talked among each other in twos and threes, the speaker of the minute looking sideways into his auditors face and concentrating his argument by a

contraction of one eyelid during delivery. The greater number carried in their hands ground-ash saplings, using them partly as walking sticks and partly for poking up pigs, sheep, neighbours with their backs turned."

"During conversation each subjected his sapling to great varieties of usage: bending it between his hands or perhaps it was hastily tucked under the arms whilst the sample bag was pulled forth and a handful of corn poured into the palm, which after criticism, was flung upon the floor." Wallingford, on the Thames, has a very good specimen of this type of market hall.

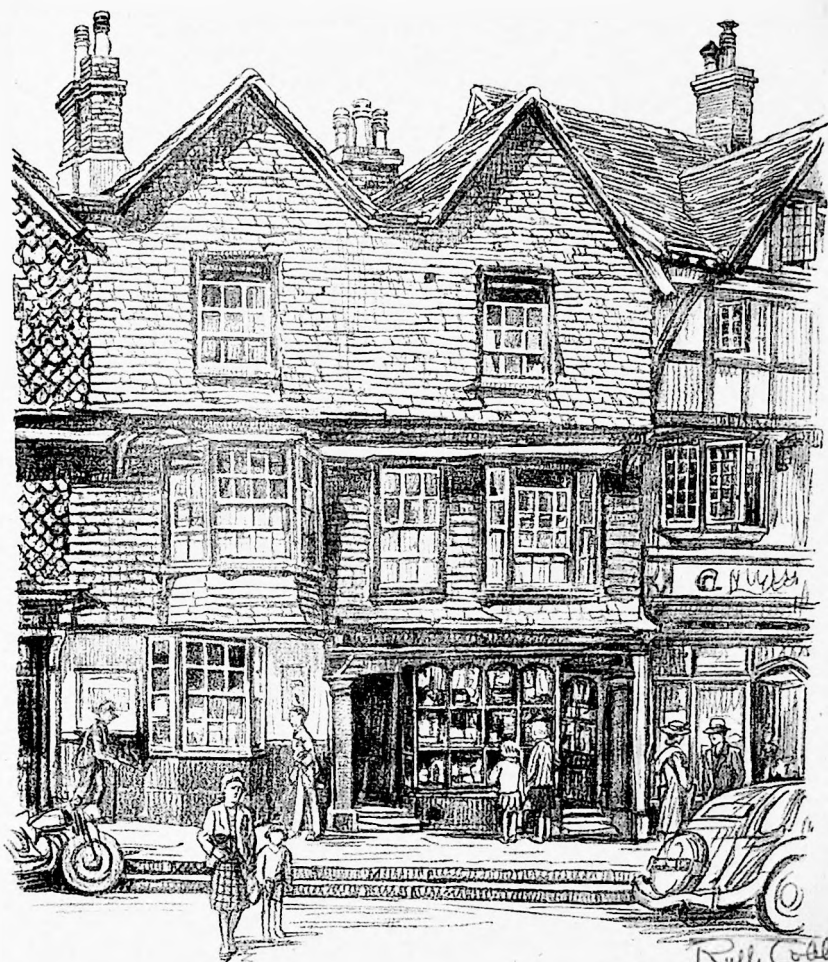
Markets often had a special character according to the kind of district of which it were the centre. In the apple-growing country it was a usual sight to see a man standing in the market place and holding a specimen apple tree, taller than himself—"the boughs rising above the heads of the farmers, brought a delightful suggestion of orchards into the heart of the town."

In some towns in England, market day has ceased to exist altogether, but in others, in the Midlands and some agricultural districts, they still flourish. Cambridge, so much of a country town as well as the centre of a University, has a very fine market, not only for provisions, old books, old china, and curios, can be found there as well. Ely so unlike an ordinary Cathedral City has a very good market, so has Kings Lynn and many more places in the North.

In other towns where the ordinary market has ceased to be, there are still cattle markets held in a special place, not in the centre of the town. This may be at the bottom of a hill with an old castle above, now a ruin, but once the centre of the town when such a market first came into existence. On this market day a small crowd always collects nowadays to see the animals arrive in motor vans.

There is much shouting as the frightened and unwilling beasts are pushed down a plank and herded into pens below. The farmers are there walking up and down between the rows, talking to would-be buyers or leaning over the railings giving sundry pokes to the animals. The officials





R. C. C. 1911  
THE SHOPS

of the cattle market are seen wearing long drab linen coats and bowler hats. In spite of regulations, there still seems to be a good deal of minor cruelty in the way the animals are dealt with at this kind of market.

Some country towns near downland, have special sheep markets held twice a year in a field just outside the town. Temporary pens are put up, and here the sheep are brought, a good many in vans. There are black-faced sheep, white-faced sheep, long and short-faced sheep. Some towns still possess abattoirs in some of their most picturesque turnings in the centre that are still in use, as they were already in existence before the act came into force forbidding the building of abattoirs within a reasonable distance of human habitation.

In the Middle Ages, often on a saints day, special fairs were held in the market squares. One very famous fair was the great sheep fair held at Stow-on-the-Wold, in Gloucestershire. The town stands on a wide plateau on the top of a hill, 800 feet high, with a huge market-place in the centre where the fair used to be held on 13th October, the feast day of Edward the Confessor, to whom the church is dedicated. Up the roads that converge on the top of this hill came the great flocks of sheep, it was said that as many as 10,000 sheep changed hands on that day. This fair began in the reign of King Edward II. A fair is still held at Stow, but it is on 22nd May and 24th May, and chiefly for the sale of horses, it has the usual merry-go-rounds and side shows now seen at fairs.

There were hiring fairs in the market-places as late as the early 19th century when all kinds of agricultural labourers could be engaged for work on the neighbouring farms. There would be carters and waggoners, these distinguished by pieces of whip cord twisted round their hats, thatchers with a fragment of woven straw, shepherds holding their crooks, and so the situation required was known at a glance.

Some towns have covered markets, and it is thought desirable that these should increase in the future. A good development from these are the Womens Institute Markets



to be found now in so many country towns, where fruit, flowers and vegetables grown, and articles made by their members, are brought in from the villages and sold.

The shops in the towns changed gradually. When glass was first used for the windows it was very thick and in very tiny panes, the goods to be sold would have been very difficult to see through them. In course of time, glass was improved and the panes became slightly larger. This type of window, often bow-shaped, gave a very charming effect to a street, and a few of these can still be seen in some places. Many of the old shops were altered when this came into use, and now more of the old windows have been finally destroyed by blast.

The rebuilding of the shops in some country towns is often very badly done, modern shop fronts being fitted into old houses. Large panes of glass with cheap and bad lettering above are seen below tiles and gabled storeys, underneath eaves with fine carving, belonging to centuries earlier. They look an incongruous misfit in buildings that had been unchanged for many years. How delightful they must have looked then can often be seen from their backs, still quite unaltered.

Tea shops, curio, and so-called art shops, seem to do their best to preserve old shop fronts and panelled rooms within. Some tea shops have absurd names like "Joan's Pantry," Betty's Parlour," or "The Copper Kettle," but they may show a teapot or kettle hanging out side. This is a survival from the days when every shop bore a sign showing what was sold, a necessity when few people were able to read.

Most country towns of the 18th and 19th centuries possessed one good "linen-draper and haberdashers" where most people dealt and which was known far outside the town. On market day it would be thronged with farmers' wives who came there to buy their silks and muslins as well as to meet their friends. But there always seems to have been, even in small places, a milliner's shop as well, kept by a woman of genteel character who made bonnets and caps that were worn by the ladies of the town.

This can be gathered from many novels of the period.

There were no separate post offices then, they were combined with a shop as they still are in many villages to-day. This might be at a cobblers and one of the small panes in the shop window would be filled in with wood for the letter box. If the cobbler was too busy to deliver the letters himself, his wife or a post boy would bring them round to the houses. Letters were not so frequent then and a matter of curiosity, and the news of some one having had a letter would soon spread round the town.

In some places, according to the surrounding district, there would be special shops where only farm implements were sold, and a good saddler's, a delight to the eye. There would be an old book shop with a box outside where books could be turned over, a direct survival from the "seld" or outside stall, the earliest kind of shop.

There are towns that are famous for some special sweetmeat, or cake, or pie. The shops where these are sold are very largely patronized for their special wares, and these shops are often to be found in a street away from the usual shopping centre. There have always been the little sweet shops adored by children, who loved to gaze at the goodies in the glass jars shown in the small bow-fronted window, perhaps once part of a private house such as Miss Matty opened in "Cranford" as a shop.

But it is the invasion of the "multiple shop" that has made such a revolution in the aspect of some of the streets in a country town. It has brought the "masked" shop front, and the shop with exactly the same shaped shop front as those belonging to the same firm in every other town. There is nothing but sameness, sameness in appearance, sameness in things sold, sameness of name to be found all over England. Some local town names on the old shops seem to belong to the district, and to have been seen there for many generations.

Sometimes these multiple shops are gathered together in a district of their own, perhaps near to the station, but in some places, such shops may be mixed up with others in a beautiful old street. It is most interesting

that when country people are asked which kind of shop they prefer to use on their visits to the town, they invariably answer, the small shop. The individual effort should be very important in many things in a country town.

## THE HOUSES

NOTHING marks the pages of the story of the country town more than the different kinds of houses to be seen in the streets, the material they are built of invariably tells a story. Local stone or brick will give character and is most harmonious, it represents the neighbouring surroundings. There are some towns where one style of building and colour predominate because of this.

It is hardly likely that much remains above ground of dwellings that are earlier than the 14th century, but there must still be cellars that go back to the time when there was a Norman town on the spot. There are towns where a great many houses still exist belonging to the 14th and 15th centuries, magnificent specimens of one style of architecture, timber-framed buildings on a stone or brick foundation. They are a striking contrast of black and white with their lovely arrangement of wooden beams, sometimes elaborately carved. Originally they were filled in with wattle and daub, though in many cases this has now been replaced by brick and plaster. They have casement windows, some still with pieces of the early glass in the lead work.

This style of house in a town, was often narrower and higher than the cottages of the same period to be seen about the country. Some towns in England, such as Tewkesbury, Ledbury, Stratford-on-Avon and Ludlow, still have plenty of these timbered houses and care is used in preserving them, it is realized that they are of great historical value.

As the years went by, some of these old houses were refaced with stone and tiles, wooden beams were no doubt regarded as old fashioned. Thatched roofs were



TUDOR HOUSES  
Ruth Cobb

replaced with other material, but the inside was left fairly untouched. The need for larger windows brought many alterations. In the reign of the Stuarts many fine stone and brick houses were built, grouped brick chimneys were a charming addition to these.

There are some places where the houses seem to be built entirely from stone of the neighbourhood, darkened in the course of years, originally they have been a lovely golden cream, the colour of the stone when dug out of the ground. Others have always been grey, expressing the bleakness of the surrounding hills. There are places near the sea where flints have been used for the houses, in some parts of Sussex these are to be seen cut into squares, but this is uncommon.

In some country towns, houses built in the days of Queen Anne and the early Georges seem to predominate. These houses are large, abutting on to the pavement, long and low with large sashed windows below the cornice, and small dormer windows in the tiled roof above. They are built of a fine brick that has become mellowed with age, there is a great dignity about these dwellings. The doorways above a flight of steps are often beautiful in design, as also were the iron railings that separated them from the side-walk. It is still possible to picture the men and women who once stepped out of them, dressed in silk and laces and with powdered wigs, the men mounting their horses, the ladies entering their sedan chairs.

It is sometimes a matter of wonder why such large houses, that are still to be seen among the shops in the main street, existed in small country towns. Who were the people who lived in them, and what were their occupations?

It would appear that some houses were built for people who lived in their houses outside in the country for part of the year, but as the roads became impassible in winter, they would have been completely cut off, they moved into the towns with their large families until spring-time.

In this type of house, some of the most important citizens lived, the Mayor, the Banker, the Lawyer, the Corn Merchant and so on. Doctors still occupy this kind





Wilson's House at Little Chalfont  
17



THE TERRACE

of house, the apothecary of the past lived over his shop, he had not the same social status. A great many of these fine houses are at present used as offices.

Most of the big banks have branches in the country towns and occupy such houses, the modern desks and furnishings are a strange contrast to panelled walls and fine plaster ceilings. In the past there would have been only one private bank. Banks were very important, for the big farmers of the neighbourhood used them as well as the great houses close by, who drew the wages for their enormous staffs, when the household was in residence.

It is fortunate that so many of these fine houses are being preserved in this way. Very often there are Victorian houses of great charm, of three stories, and a door in the middle, with bowed fronts and windows on either side. There may also be some ugly houses among them, belonging to a bad period of architecture that many towns would be better without. They are covered with dull stucco that gives a dingy effect, but some low houses can look very charming when painted cream, with windows and doors of a bright green, or even black, giving colour to a street and having a character of their own.

This mixture of different kinds of houses is sometimes very fascinating, especially when they are built right on to the pavement in a way that is so typical of the country town. There then seems to be an intimacy with the life of the streets, and the work that is going on in the town, with a consciousness, too, of the fine old gardens behind the houses.

Dorchester was once like this, it is much altered now: "The front doors of the private houses were mostly left open at this warm autumn time, no thought of umbrella stealers disturbing the minds of the placid burgesses. Hence through the long straight entrance passages thus enclosed could be seen, as through tunnels, the mossy gardens at the back, glowing with nasturtiums, fuchsias, scarlet geraniums, snap-dragons and dahlias, this floral blaze being backed by crusted grey stonework. The

old-fashioned fronts of these houses, which had old-fashioned backs, rose sheer from the pavement, into which, like bastions, necessitating a pleasing *shassez dechassez* movement to the time pressed pedestrian at every few yards."

The poorer parts of the town very often have pleasing rows of cottages with small front gardens suggesting the country. There is the feeling of a village in these streets.

In the residential part of a country town, there are often to be seen rows of houses—The Terrace. This is often beautifully designed, with brick houses in a fine curve. Some of these terraces may have stone gateways at each end, with a plot of grass in front, and narrow balconies on the first floor, running the entire length, that have finely wrought ironwork.

Other terraces may consist of narrow painted houses, with steep roofs and a little narrow front garden before each, the repetition is extremely pleasant to the eye. It is nice to imagine people dressed in poke bonnets, crinolines and carrying large muffs coming out of the doorways. There is a tendency now to divide such houses into flats. These charming terraces should be carefully preserved and the houses adapted to modern needs. They show what care and thought in design can produce.

Then there are the modern "Estates," just outside the town, creeping up the hillside in an aimless way, and often quite out of keeping with the rest of the town. The houses are all alike and without character, pretentious in appearance, badly built, with factory-made shoddy decorations, there is nothing pleasing about their repetition, or anything about them that will improve with time, as has happened to so many of the lovely houses in the town itself. In ten years they may be the epitome of shabbiness. If care is not taken there may be more and more of this mushroom growth outside the towns, and no suggestion of a "Green Belt." Towns will tend to become more and more alike with nothing to differentiate one place from another, they will indeed become "Wens" on a hillside.



Ruth Cobb  
1888

## THE SCHOOL

THE early morning trains and buses arriving in the country town bring numbers of children, who come into the secondary schools from the neighbouring villages. There are girls in nice uniforms and boys with cheerful caps and mufflers. They join the procession of town children on their way to the modern school buildings with their open surroundings, on the edge of the town.

But many towns still possess old and often historic "Grammar Schools" that have existed for several hundreds of years, founded originally for "the teaching of Latin." The buildings are often very picturesque with overhanging gables, but they may have more up-to-date buildings joined on at the back that are not apparent from the street.

The very earliest school in the town may have been derived from the monastery where the monks taught some small boys, and some of these schools may have survived the Dissolution. They have continued through a private bequest of money left in the 16th century for the founding of "A Free Grammar School." The master may have been required to instruct so many boys gratuitously as the trustees may direct, the number never to exceed twelve. In the course of years the funds for such schools may have increased in value, as well as the size of the town, and so the number of pupils has been enlarged.

The education in some of these Grammar Schools has developed with the years, and they have been classed for some time as a secondary school and have had a government grant. Some years ago, a school may still have been held in the one old Elizabethan room, but an energetic headmaster may have so increased the school prestige, and increased its numbers, that it may have had to move into new buildings. Sometimes the old buildings would be pulled down, but in other places, being in the centre of the town, they have become municipal offices.

Steining has a good modern Grammar School, still housed in its old picturesque building with gables and



THE COURT HOUSE  
PEVENSEY

weather-boarding. Originally it belonged to one of the Guilds and was known as Brotherhood Hall. This Grammar School was founded in the year 1614 by an alderman of Chichester, and its pupils were to be limited to fifty. Each boy paid eightpence a year, a penny of which went each quarter for the buying of brooms and brushes for the upkeep of the building, the rest for candles for lighting it. There are some Grammar Schools that take girls as well as boys.

Many country towns still have private schools.

With the coming inspection under the new Education Act, this type of school is hardly likely to survive. Some of the old Grammar Schools, unless they are prepared to adapt themselves to the required standards, will also disappear.

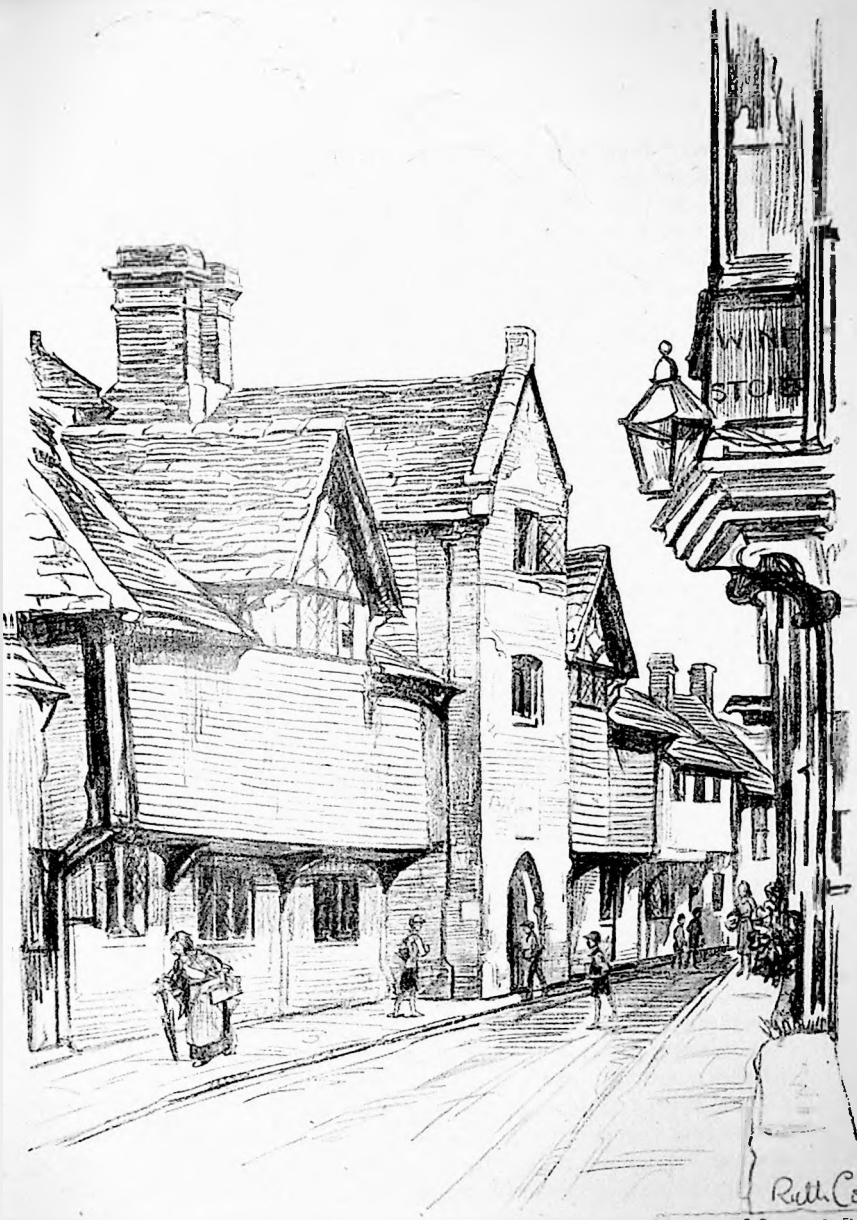
But the name "Grammar School" that seems so essentially to belong to the country town, will fortunately always be there, for now the name County School will vanish from the town, and the schools that will give higher academic education will have the ancient title, Grammar School.

## THE INN

BEFORE the coming of mechanized vehicles and railways, the Inns in the country towns played an important part in the life of the place. There was generally one of chief importance in the centre of the town, perhaps in the market place. If it were a county town, the barristers would lunch there during the Assizes, and important official dinners would be held there. This inn would be the stopping place for the mail coach, and for important people travelling "post." The poorer townsmen generally frequented humbler taverns.

The inns developed after the monastery Guest Houses ceased to be, the first were probably for the use of the large bands of pilgrims who travelled the roads in the Middle Ages. One of these inns still remains at Gloucester, the





Ruth Colt  
THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL

so-called "New Inn," one of the few galleried inns left and still in use in this country.

The old inns were large buildings, with big stabling, where travellers' horses could be put up, as well as those needed during the hunting season. There was usually an archway at one side under which the coach would drive to change horses. In a journey taken by Mr. Pickwick and his three friends they pulled up "at the Inn yard, where fresh horses with cloths were already waiting. The coachman throws down the reins and gets down himself and the other outside passengers drop down also, except those who have no great confidence in their ability to get up again, and they remain where they are, and stamp their feet against the coach to warm them, looking with longing eyes and red noses at the bright fire at the inn bar, and the sprigs of holly with red berries which ornament the window."

In some cases, the archway has now vanished, its chief use has gone. The fine old inn at Dorking, "The White Horse," is still unchanged outside from the days of Charles Dickens.

Many people who visited this inn believed it to be the original of the "Marquis of Granby" at Dorking, where Sam Weller visited his father. Dickens himself implied that it was based on "The Nags Head" on the Brighton Road, since pulled down.

A number of the inns in the country towns are still delightful buildings to look at, with their gaily painted signs hanging outside, showing perhaps that they had such names as "The Maiden's Head," "The Hop Pole," or "The Lamb." They may be painted white outside, and have bow fronts, and one large three-light window showing that it possesses an assembly room where in earlier centuries "the different country families met together once a month to dance and play cards."

The Bennet girls in "Pride and Prejudice" attended fortnightly dances at the inn at Meryton, their nearest country town, one mile from their home. In the film of this book a great mistake has been made, the dance is



KINGS HEAD HOTEL & HIGH ST.

P. Cobb.

shown to be taking place in a palatial hall with pillars, creating an entirely false setting for the period. Much can be learnt from contemporary novels of the inns of those times. Their assembly rooms were of an intimate size with the large window at one end, and a small gallery for the musicians at the other. In "Emma" there is a discussion whether the room at the "Crown Inn" at Hartfield is large enough to take twenty couples. "It was an inconsiderable house though the principal one of the sort, where a couple of post horses were kept for the convenience of the neighbourhood than for any run on the road. The ballroom, built many years ago when the neighbourhood had been in a particularly dancing state, is still occasionally used as such."

The assembly rooms at the inn at Knutsford was only used at long intervals in Mrs. Gaskell's day, perhaps an entertainment such as a "conjurer" was held there, then there was great excitement. To-day, such rooms may be used for meetings and auctions and in some places for casual dancing.

With the increase of motor traffic on the roads there was a tendency towards the modernizing of many of the old historic inns, it was felt by some that they did not compare with the hotels built of steel and glass, that were springing up throughout the country. What may not follow? But something irreplaceable will be lost if the old coaching inns vanish away.

## THE TOWN HALL

In the beginning of the history of the towns, many things gradually developed that eventually brought them self government and free speech for the populace. Citizens, traders and shopkeepers vigorously protested against the tyranny of the overlords. In this way the real life of the people of the towns began.

In course of time, Charters were given to the boroughs by the king which granted them various rights, and protected

their trade. For a long while the king nominated the chief magistrate in the towns who was known as the "Portreeve." This was before there was any organized Corporation. The office of Mayor was to come later.

Part of the town was governed by aldermen, and there were the organizations of the "Guilds" in the early days. In the Middle Ages, these were organizations of craftsmen, and tradesmen who watched over and protected their particular craft or trade, to see that it was conducted honourably and economically, and to give help and mutual aid in the prosecution of a common object. In some places there was no special craft, so they merely had a merchant guild, but it became very important in the town.

The few towns that existed in Saxon times, seem to have had some kind of merchant guild and after a while, it was revised and a Charter gave them special privileges by the Norman lords who were governing the "Rapes," or administrative division of a county. The merchant guilds were the earliest form of municipal government.

By the 16th century there were regular elections for a council that was elected from among themselves, the members being chosen from "the wealthier and discreeter sort of the townsmen." The Guilds owned halls of their own, where members met and considered their affairs, and a few of these beautiful old Guild Halls still stand, and it was in these buildings that the first Town Councils held their sittings.

These halls usually stood in the centre of a town, perhaps on an island site in the High Street, and were sometimes built above arches. Underneath stood the Town Stocks in which offenders were placed to be jeered at by the passers by, and sometimes a Whipping Post. Now, a tablet on the wall is all that is left to show where the stocks once stood.

In the course of years it came to be felt that the old Town Halls were becoming too small, and perhaps were an obstruction in the roadway, so that many were pulled down and a more important building put up in another

part of the town. But so many of these are artistically uninteresting, both inside and out, and often are badly placed. Sometimes an old mansion has been converted for a Town Hall, then perhaps a fine stone staircase and oak pannelling may have been kept from the original building. But so often the main hall is a dull building, decorated with pictures of former Members of Parliament and Mayors.

Pevensey still has its old Town Hall intact, and it is said to be the smallest in England, but the place no longer possesses either a mayor or a corporation. Because of the receding of the sea, Pevensey has shrunk from a thriving port and borough into the status of a village. The Court House was the headquarters of the "Corporation, bailiff or mayor, juriats and freemen of the town." The election of the bailiff was held once a year inside the church of St. Nicholas close by.

The Petty Sessions were held in the small upper room of this Town Hall, there was a miniature dock, and the jury considered their verdicts jammed together in the oriel window overlooking the street. The offenders were mostly smugglers like the majority of the inhabitants. Underneath was the lock-up with two cells, the solitary constable combined the duties with that of the mace-bearer and vergers of the church.

Until the 19th century, many country towns did not receive a Charter of Incorporation, and so could not have a mayor of their own. But in the Town Halls of to-day, besides the ordinary sittings of the chief magistrate to try local offenders, much work has been done there for the well being of the citizens.

## THE PARISH CHURCH

ON approaching by road, the first sign of a country town is generally the tip of a church steeple appearing over a rise, probably that of the principal or Parish Church. It usually stands in a prominent and central part of a town,



THE PARISH CHURCH

Rich Cobb

and in the past it has played an important part in the history of the town.

But not all churches have steeples, some only have towers, and these vary in height according to the district, as well as in the material of which they are built. Some steeples are quite low, others of much greater height. The tower that supported a high spire was first seen in the days of the Gothic builders, and it gradually became more and more elaborate in design as the years passed. The steeples also differed in shape and materials, sometimes they were built entirely of stone, or of wood covered with stone or shingles. These are small pieces of wood that are generally used on rather squat spires, pyramidal in shape, and sometimes known as the Sussex cap, many are to be seen in that county.

Nowadays, a steeple is apt to be thought of merely as an ornament to a church, but originally they must have often been intended as landmarks, some had braziers in which flares were burnt. Some church towers were separate from the rest of the building. Lewes possesses a church tower that is round, this is thought by some to have been built as a beacon tower, to guide the sailors who sailed up the wide inlet of the sea on which the town once stood, and that the body of the church was built on to it later. George Fox, the Quaker, who lived in the 17th century, used in derision, to describe the Parish Church as the "Steeple House."

Many Parish Churches in the country towns are of great age and interest from which a great deal can be learnt of the life and history of the past. A few may have remains of Saxon work, traces of a window or a door, there are few churches in a complete state of preservation of that period. There are many beautiful Norman churches left with fine simple pillars in the nave, but with roofs of later date, as many of the original roofs collapsed from the weight on the curved arches that supported them. There are many Gothic churches in the country towns with pointed arches and greater height.





Some of the old churches in the towns were once "Collegiate" churches, part of a monastery round which the town lay, these were served by priests from the Priory below the town. Many of these "Collegiate" churches became ruins at the Dissolution of the Monasteries. The name of the saint to whom the monastery had been dedicated, such as St. Pancras, may still survive as the name of the modern Roman Catholic Church in the town.

As a country town grew, it needed more parishes and more churches, but there is still the chief one spoken of as "The Church" which the Mayor and Corporation attend in state on special occasions, and if it be a county town, by the Judge at the opening of the assizes.

Some of the churches in small country towns now seem to be very large for the size of the place. This is generally when the town was once much larger and may have declined in prosperity through natural causes, such as the receding of the sea, as happened at Shoreham and Winchelsea and other places. They both have huge churches compared with the rest of the town, and yet those churches now only consist of what was once the choir, or perhaps the nave and choir of the original building.

New Romney Church is a good example of this kind of thing. The place was once a thriving port. In the 14th century ships were able to anchor just beyond the churchyard. Then the sea receded, and it is now an inland town, with the sea several miles away. The church of St. Nicholas stands to tell of its earlier importance. Except for the top, the tower is Norman and very beautiful. From the first this church, like so many others in the past, has always been used for many municipal purposes. The Mayor is still elected round the table tomb of Sir Richard Sheppenge, erected in the 16th century "for the use of the ancient meeting and election of Mayor and Juriats of this port toyne."

William Cobbett notices the largeness of these churches. Speaking of Old Romney, the first town which the sea left before New Romney was built in the hope it would recede no further, he says: "At this Old Romney there



THE MEETING HOUSE

Ruth Cobb  
-14

is a church fit to contain 1,500 people and there are for the people of the parish to live in twenty-two or twenty-three houses."

Appleby, in Westmorland, is now a very small place gathered round a castle. Although a county town it seems little more than a village, but foundations of buildings found in the fields close by show that it was once a very big and important place.

Some churches show many things about the industry of their town. In the churches of the Cotswold towns, there are brasses engraved with figures of the wool merchants in their furred robes, their feet resting on a woolly sheep, and in the churchyard outside the decoration on the tombs is sometimes a stone bale of wool.

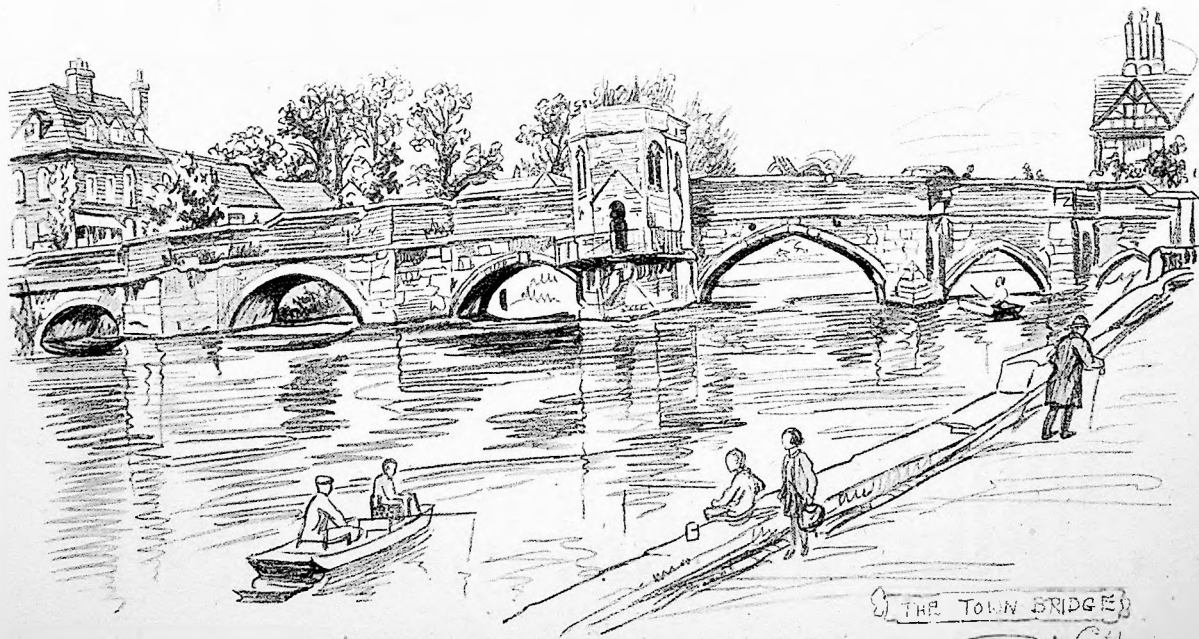
There are many interesting things to be seen inside the church apart from the actual fabric, chained bibles, old chests and brasses, three-decker pulpits, and wooden galleries where the choir and musicians once sat, a few fragments of very early glass, all these belong to different periods in the building's history. There may even be the remains of an anchorite or hermits cell, who was buried in his or her cell in the church.

All country towns have several nonconformist chapels of various denominations, sometimes there may be an old meeting house among them, with panelled walls of the 17th century and high-backed pews. Those belonging to The Society of Friends are often delightful spots with a peaceful burial ground at the side. Here, the "Quakers" met on the sabbath and still meet and carry out their ideals of service for all mankind.

There is surely no more charming sound to be heard in a country town on a Sunday morning than the ringing of the church bells. Bells have in the past sounded for danger as well as for peace.

## THE BRIDGE

Towns that have a river running through them, generally have a distinct character their of own, specially if the river



THE TOWN BRIDGE

Ruth C. C.

flows through the centre. If it is not many miles from the sea, there may be wharfs and warehouses, and perhaps a mill, while of course there is invariably the town bridge.

The main bridge across the river is a very important part of such a town. It may have been built in the first place across a shallow part of the river where there was a ford. Before the building of stone bridges there would have been a number of wooden ones. At first, these would have been made of solid tree trunks, with piles for the foundations, so that it would bear the weight of the traffic above, the rough carts of the country folk and the horses of travellers.

There are very few wooden bridges of any size left in England. But there is one that is still in use at Old Shoreham in Sussex. This has been very skilfully strengthened with iron girders that are not visible, and so it is able to stand the weight of modern traffic. In times of flood, the wooden bridges were in danger of falling to pieces, it became dangerous to cross them, and it was very inconvenient for the people living in the country outside the town who wanted to bring their wares into the market.

So in course of time, stone bridges were built, at first in a very simple form with only a single arch, and often built by the local stone mason. Gradually these were replaced by bigger bridges with more arches. They were still very narrow, so much so that it was often dangerous for pedestrians to cross at the same time as vehicles and horses.

To prevent this, triangular recesses were often built on the top of the stone piers that stood between the arches, and there people on foot were able to stand and wait until those on horseback and passed by. It is quite often convenient to-day to use these recesses found on so many of the old bridges.

There are bridges that have round arches, and others with pointed arches, and they are often of very fine designs. Some show scars where the bridge was once broken to prevent an enemy force from invading the town.

In the Middle Ages there used to be constant disputes

as to who should repair the town bridges. In some big towns they were in charge of a Bridge Master, but in smaller places it was a matter of great contention. Sometimes the only way to get a bridge mended, was for the Abbot of a neighbouring monastery to say that the work was a pious one, and that sins would be forgiven in return for work on the bridge.

Chapels stood on some bridges, and seem to have had some connection with the upkeep of the bridge. There are only four of these left in England. One is at St. Ives, in Huntingdonshire. This bridge is built of grey stone. It has six arches, the oldest are those that are pointed in shape. Because the others are round, it is often supposed that they were the first to be built, but that is not so. They replaced some pointed arches when the bridge had to be partly rebuilt in the 16th century.

In the centre of the bridge stands the tiny chapel, and this is dedicated to St. Leger, a saint who lived in the 7th century and was Bishop of Autun in France, and suffered martyrdom. A brick story was added to the chapel later on, but it has now been pulled down as its weight was becoming too much for the bridge.

A town bridge is often a favourite meeting place for idlers, and for others after the day's work is over. Men leaning over the parapet gaze into the water below. It can be imagined that they are admiring the fish and water plants, but unfortunately where the water is shallow, a great deal of town refuse is to be seen, old tins, shoes and such like that seem to have endless fascination for onlookers.

A bridge still plays an important part in the life of a town. In outward appearance it may appear to have altered little for many centuries, although it may have had to be strengthened to take the mechanized traffic of to-day.

## A TOWN INDUSTRY

IN past times, many country towns had special characteristics because of a local industry that provided work

for its citizens, but since the arrival of machinery, many of these have gradually died away. This is specially so with things that might be called crafts or rightly perhaps an art, such as lace making.

In some towns in Devonshire, nearly every woman once worked at that and could be seen sitting in the doorway of their houses busily employed in "throwing" the bobbins on their lace pillows. Now, with changing fashions, and because of the high quality of machine-made lace, this industry has slowly declined until now it is only kept up a little for the benefit of visitors.

It is the same with hand weaving. Formerly, all the women did the spinning necessary to provide the yarn for the clothes of their men folk and themselves. This was woven by workmen in their own houses or in work sheds on looms. There is a good account of this in George Eliots novel "Silas Marner."

There are some towns where an old industry still flourishes such as High Wickham, known for chair manufacturing. Some efforts are now being made to revive a few of these old industries in the country towns, such as weaving, quilting, woodwork and so on, crafts that will bring joy to the maker from the work of his hands.

But there are many industries concerned with the absolute necessities of living, such as milling, which flourishes in towns standing on the banks of a river. Some old mills are working as they have done through hundreds of years, some still believing there is more value in flour that is stone rolled than ground by machinery.

Some industries give a special odour to a place, tanning is one of these, a tan yard at Tewkesbury is described in the novel "John Halifax, Gentleman." In the book the town is called Norton Bury, and one of its characters says: "My father's tanyard was in a little alley a little further on. Already, I perceived the familiar odour, sometimes a not unpleasant rank smell, at other times borne in horrible wafts as from a lately forsaken battlefield."

Other industries have a pleasanter smell, in the centre of a hop-growing industry, brewing might be the most





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important work of a town. This is one of the oldest industries in the world, the aroma from a brewery will often pervade a whole district. The mills and breweries in a town, busily at work, may still have a great beauty of their own if they are well designed for the work they have to do.

Perhaps the town is agricultural and situated amidst a corn-growing district. Perhaps here the visitor will sense least change. These are still the places to which the country products are brought to the market, and distributing centre : grain and cattle and eggs.

### THE ALMSHOUSES

IN the first place it was the monasteries who cared for the aged, infirm and poor of the towns, one of the pious works of the monks, but after the Dissolution, this ceased, but many special homes were endowed and provided for them. This was sometimes done by the guilds and companies, but more often the money and buildings were given by private donors. There are many famous almshouses of this kind in the towns of England.

A number of the original buildings for these almshouses are still lived in, and very charming to look at. Some are timbered buildings, others are built of stone or mellowed brick, according to the district. The smaller almshouses may consist of a terrace of houses, others of little dwellings round a courtyard, with a separate dining hall and chapel, the inmates have separate rooms of their own.

The almshouse may be for twelve old men, to be known as Brethren, with a Master in charge. Originally these old men had been tenants and servants of the founder and his heirs of the almshouses, to have lived in the county or have been wounded in the service of the King. To-day, these old men often wear a special uniform, or perhaps a coloured gown with the silver badge of the founder on one arm. This may be one of the original badges provided for the first twelve men. The old conditions governing



THE ALMSHOUSE  
H. Cobb.

admittance to the almshouses have often been considerably altered.

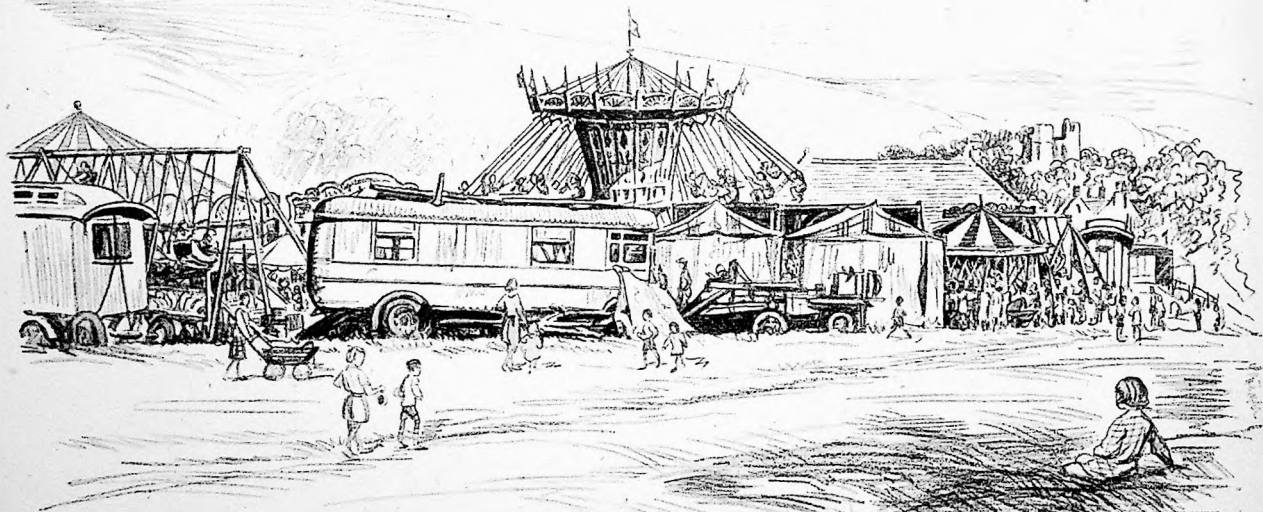
There are some almshouses for "women only" that have very quaint old rules. The women were required then to be of "an honest life and conversation, religious, grave and discreet, able to read, a single woman, her place to be void on marriage, at least fifty years of age. No one who was a beggar, or a scold, or drunkard would be admitted, and they could be expelled if any of these conditions were broken. Rules were laid down for daily prayers to be held both in the chapel and in the inmates own rooms. Some almshouse women also wear an old-fashioned dress on Sundays and festival occasions, with the badge of the founder. The high hat, ruff and cloak were the ordinary attire for women when the almshouse was built.

There is no more peaceful sight in a country town than the delightful-looking old almshouses, where the inmates can spend a peaceful old age, the men and women together in comfort, looked after in illness, and with the feeling that they still have a home of their own in the place where they were born and spent their working days.

## THE SHOW GROUND

THERE are many old play-bills still in existence showing that some quite small country towns once possessed a theatre of their own, where constant dramatic performances were given in the days when many famous actors and actresses travelled the country. But in cases, in the early nineteenth century, there seems to have been strong Puritanical feelings in some towns that led to the closing of the theatre, and the building was either pulled down or put to other uses.

There were also in earlier days, visits from various strolling entertainers who gave their performances in the assembly rooms, such as Signor Brunoni described in "Cranford" which caused a welcome mild excitement



Nath. G. W.  
(THE FAIR &  
OUTSIDE THE TOWN)

among those inhabitants who could afford to pay to see them.

Most country towns seem to have a piece of waste ground just outside known as the Fair Ground. Here in past centuries the towns-people met for festivity and jollification. Now comes the travelling circuses, vans and lorries and caravans arrive. A crowd of children gather to see the tents miraculously appearing, swings and merry-go-rounds and other marvellous structures, often incongruous, but bringing delight to many.

The travelling show can trace its ancestry back many generations and if method of fun changes, the modernized versions find favour in the modern age.

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